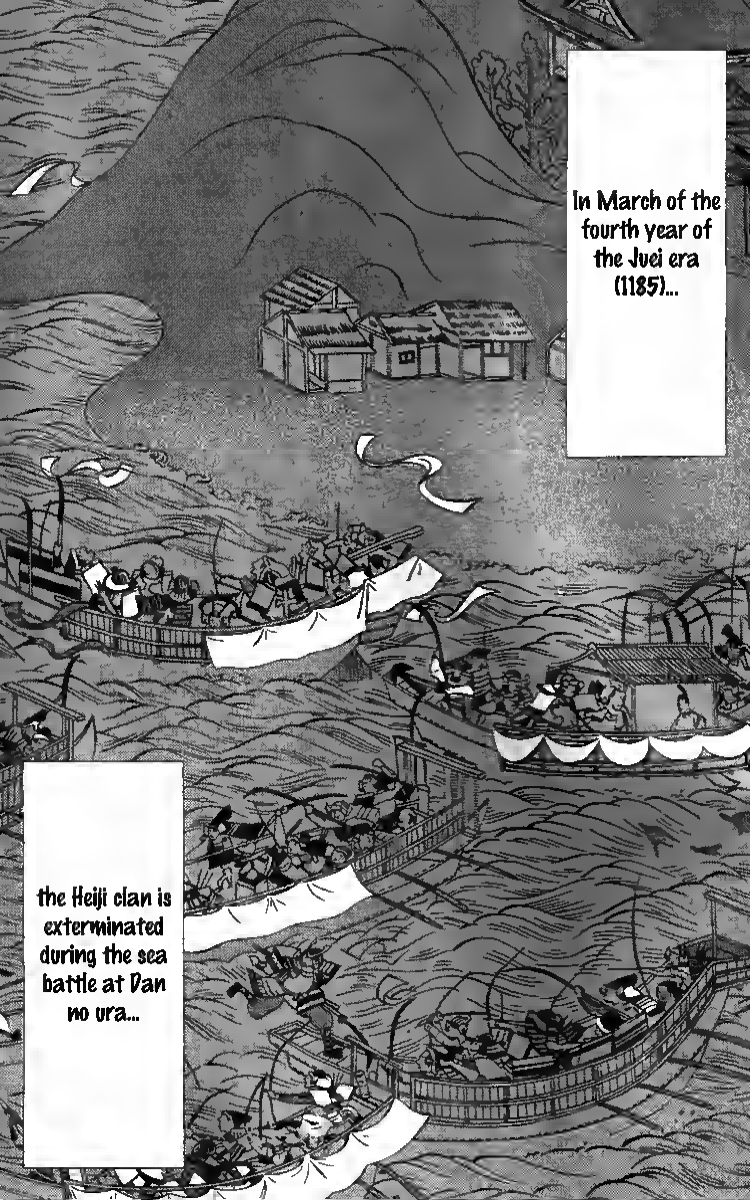

In March of the fourth year of the Juei era (1185)...
the Heiji clan is exterminated during the sea battle at Dan no ura...

THE STORY OF AZAMARU...:

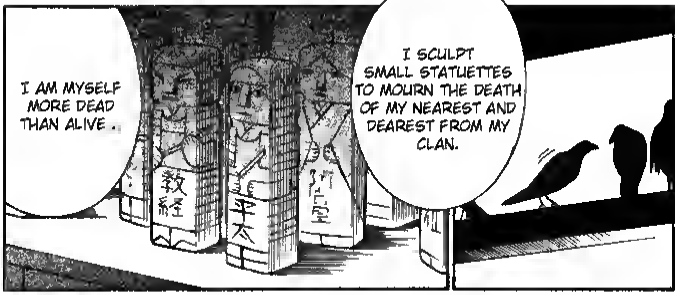
AZAMARU IS A WORK OF FICTION WHOSE MAIN PLOT IS BASED UPON REAL HISTORICAL FACTS: THE WARS OF THE CLANS WHICH TORE APART JAPAN IN THE 12TH CENTURY.
ON ONE SIDE, THE TAIRA (ALSO CALLED "HEIJI") AND ON THE OTHER ONE, THE MINAMOTO (ALSO CALLED "GENJI")....
THE GREAT VICTOR OF THOSE MURDEROUS WARS WERE: THE GENJI/MINAMOTO.
THIS STORY'S HERO, AKUBE, BELONGS TO THE VANQUISHED HEJI CLAN. HE'S EVEN ONE OF THE RARE SURVIVORS...
TOMOE WAS THE PROTEGE OF THE PREVIOUS SHOGUN (COUSIN TO THE MINAMOTO) WHO, AFTER SOME GREAT FAMILY RIVALRY, WAS ALSO KILLED DURING A FIGHT BY ANOTHER MINAMOTO...
THE STORY STARTS SEVERAL YEARS AFTER THE WAR ENDED. TOMOE, QUITE DETERMINED ON TAKING REVENGE, IS LOOKING FOR SURVIVORS OF THE BROKEN-UP CLANS IN ORDER TO RALLY THEM TO HER CAUSE AND RETURN TO BATTLE.

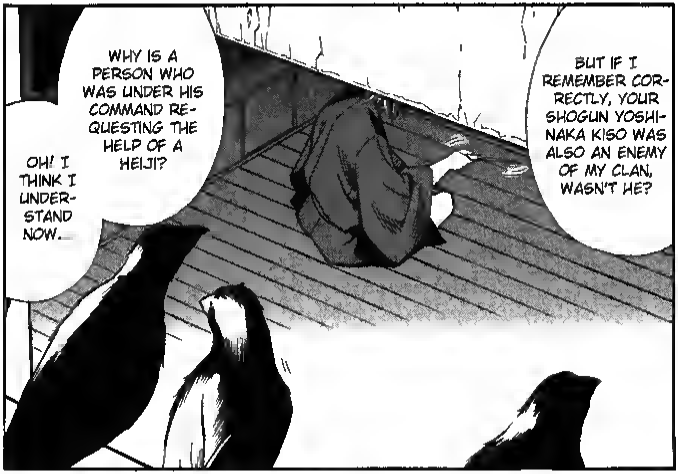
PLEASE, LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF TO YOU. MY NAME IS TOMOE, PREVIOUSLY UNDER THE COMMAND OF SHOGUN YOSHINAKA...
SHOGUN YOSHINAKA KISO WAS KILLED DURING THE BATTLE AGAINST THE MINAMOTO.
Chapter 1: Akube from Himuka Province.

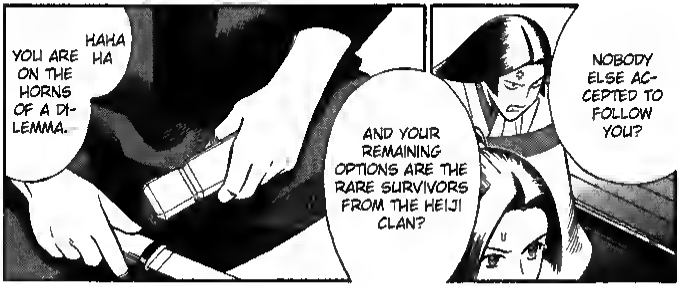
IT'S A SIX-YEAR-OLD HATRED..
WHICH DROVE ME TO MEET YOU..
A RUMOUR ABOUT A SURVIVING DESERTER FROM THE HEIJI CLAN REACHED US. AND I FOUND YOU HERE, IN THIS PROVINCE OF HIMUKA.
MY CLAN WAS ALSO EXTERMINATED BY YORIMOTO NO MINAMOTO..
THAT'S WHY I'M TAKING THE LIBERTY OF ASKING YOU...

...AND TO FIGHT BY OUR SIDE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE REVENGE!
TO WEAR THE ENSIGN OF YOUR FALLEN CLAN ONCE AGAIN.
...

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF LEAVING THIS PLACE.
YOU JOURNEYED VERY FAR FOR NOTHING, MISS TOMOE..
YES... DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO THIS MASK,
...I USE IT TO COVER THE BURN SCARS ON MY FACE.
I'M AKUBE.
I ONLY GO BY THAT NAME NOW.


I AM MYSELF MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE.
I SCULPT SMALL STATUETTES TO MOURN THE DEATH OF MY NEAREST AND DEAREST FROM MY CLAN.


OH! I THINK I UNDERSTAND NOW...
WHY IS A PERSON WHO WAS UNDER HIS COMMAND REQUESTING THE HELP OF A HEIJI?
BUT IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, YOUR SHOGUN YOSHINAKA KISO WAS ALSO AN ENEMY OF MY CLAN, WASN'T HE?


HAHA HA
YOU ARE ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA.
AND YOUR REMAINING OPTIONS ARE THE RARE SURVIVORS FROM THE HEIJI CLAN?
NOBODY ELSE ACCEPTED TO FOLLOW YOU?

YOU MUST HAVE BEEN IN DEAR NEED FOR COMING ALL THE WAY TO HIMIKA..
I WON'T LET YOU INSULT LADY TOMOE ANY LONGER!
SHE PROSTRATED HERSELF BEFORE YOU AND YOU ARE HUMILIATING HER! YOU DESERVE TO BE DECAPITATED!
IF YOU ARE MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE AS YOU SAY, THAT WON'T BE A PROBLEM, WILL IT?

YAMA-BUKI!
YE-
YES?
THE CROWS?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU NEVER STOP SCREAMING REPEATEDLY "TOMOE"....
THE BLACK CROWS FOLLOWED YOUR TRAIL?

AKUBE, I RESPECT YOUR DECISION NOT TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE US.
DON'T GO ON. WE KNEW FROM THE START THAT OUR REQUEST WOULD BE IN VAIN...
BUT PLEASE... CONSIDER YOUR ANSWER UNTIL TOMORROW.
WE'LL WAIT TILL THE EARLY HOURS ON THE TOP OF THE CLIFF.
.....

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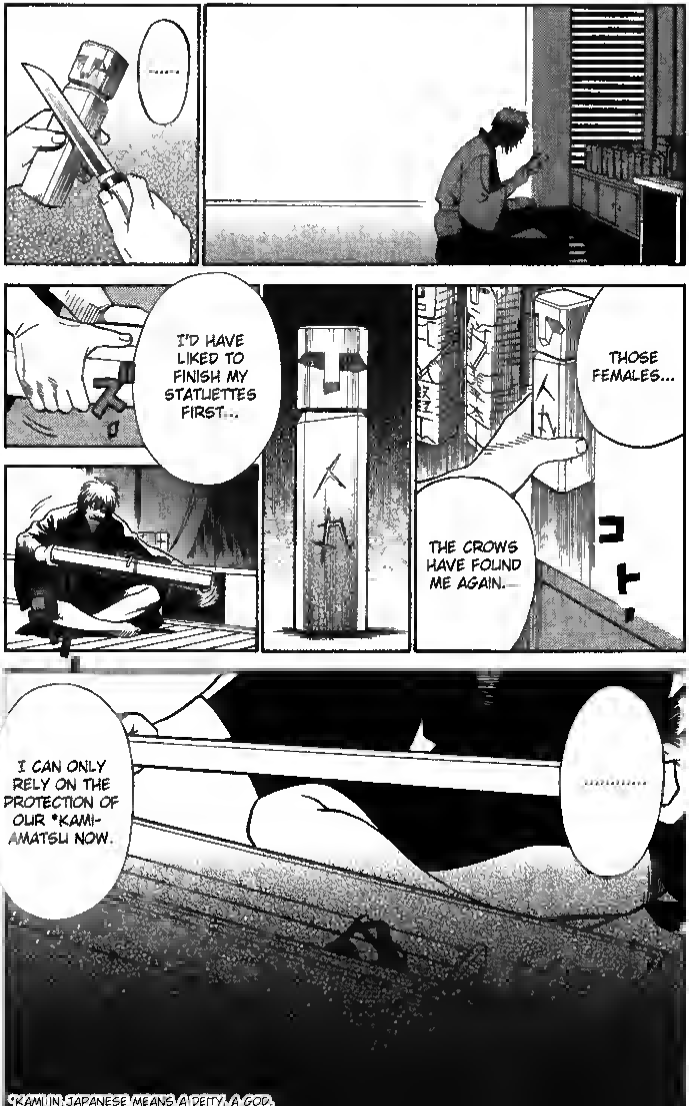
.....
I'D HAVE LIKED TO FINISH MY STATUETTES FIRST...
THOSE FEMALES...
THE CROWS HAVE FOUND ME AGAIN.
I CAN ONLY RELY ON THE PROTECTION OF OUR *KAMI-AMATSU NOW.
.....
*KAMI IN JAPANESE MEANS A DEITY, A GOD.

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Ha!
.....
HOW DARE HE BE SO ODIOUS WHEN WE ASKED HIM SO NICELY?
Calm down, Lady Tomoe!
WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS, THIS DESERTER?! AHHHH!
I'M MAD! MAD!
AHHHH!
HE INFURIATES ME!

AKUBE?
I WAS JOKING!
ODS
YUK! IT'S SO UGLY!
AH!
YUK-YUK YUK!
AND BESIDES, WHAT BAD TASTE HE SHOWS WITH THIS MASK!
THE CROWS WEREN'T LYING...
SHE REALLY IS TOMOE...
?

YOSHINAKA IS AWAITING YOU...
TOMOE!
WHO ARE YOU?!
!
PFF!
YOU ARE FROM THE GENJI CLAN?!
!

WANT TO TRY IT OUT AGAIN?
OH!

THE MARTIAL ART "KENDO" DOESN'T EXIST YET WHEN THIS STORY UNFOLDS...

WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT TILL THE MUROMACHI PERIOD (1337-1570) FOR THE "WAY OF THE SWORD", KENDO IN JAPANESE, TO BECOME A WAY OF LIFE AND A MEAN FOR SPIRITUAL RISING.

THOUGH, YAMABUKI IS ONE OF MANY WOMEN FROM THIS ERA WHO KNEW HOW TO WIELD WEAPONS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES...

YET THE WAR CEASED MORE THAN 6 YEARS AGO..
I HAD NO IDEA THAT GENJI EMISSARIES WERE STILL WATCHING US..
!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, YAMABUKI?
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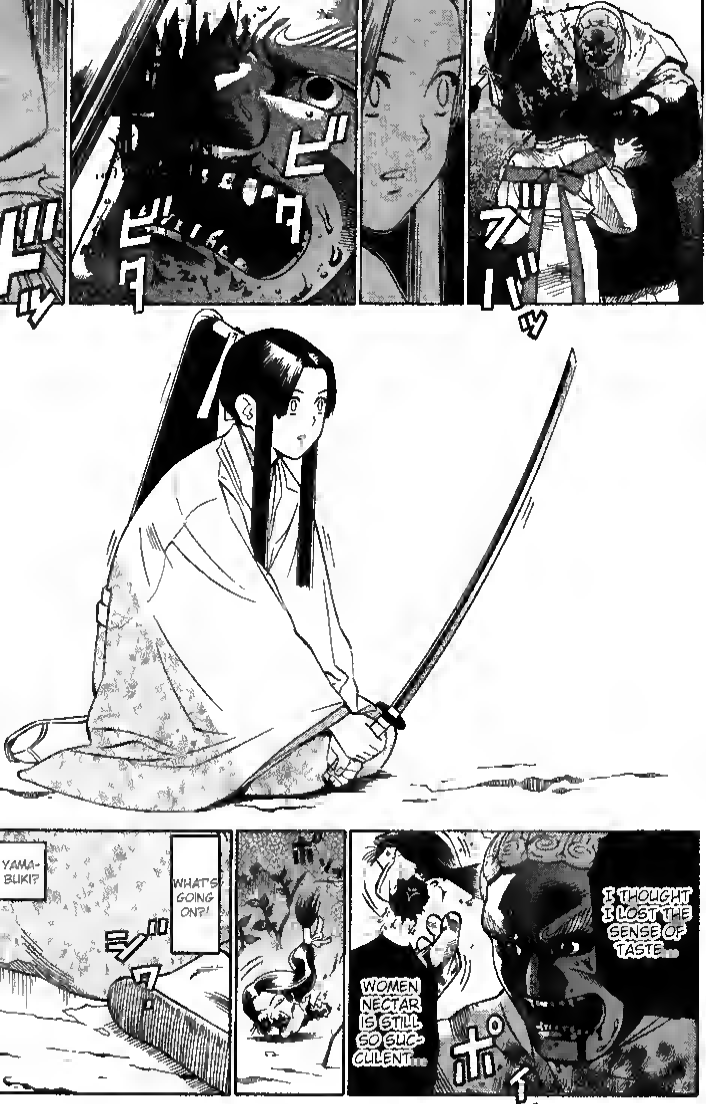
HA!!!

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE!
HIS HEART WAS PIERCED!
!!!
!


I THOUGHT I LOST THE SENSE OF TASTE...
WOMEN NECTAR IS STILL SO SUCCULENT...
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
YAMA-BUKI?

TOMOE, COME NEAR...
MY BODY ISN'T RESPONDING ANYMORE...
I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF IT!!!
!?

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!
NO
AHHHH-HHHH!

TOMOE!
HE WON'T BE LONG TO COME BACK... HURRY. WE HAVE TO LEAVE RIGHT AWAY!
ARE YOU LISTENING?

!
I CAN'T STAND UP...
WAIT!
BUT...
LET'S GO!
PFFF

YOU CAN LET GO OF ME!
I'M ABLE TO WALK!
HEY, YOU!
IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW!
ARE YOU CRAZY?
WHAT HAS GOTTEN INTO YOU?
YOU COULD AT LEAST HAVE TOLD ME BEFORE DROPPING ME!
OUCH!

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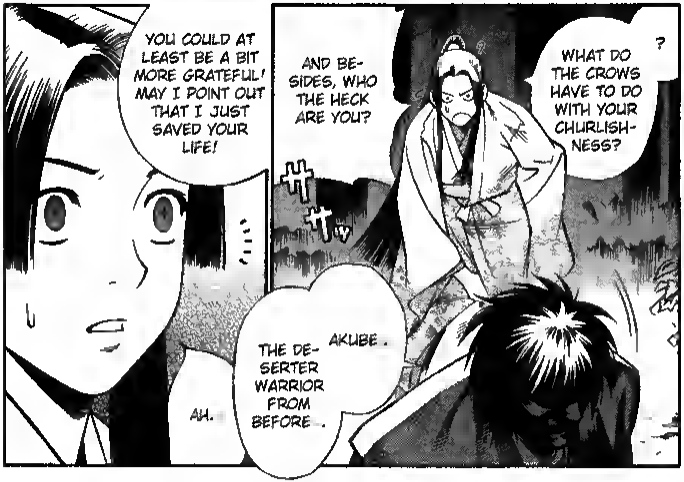
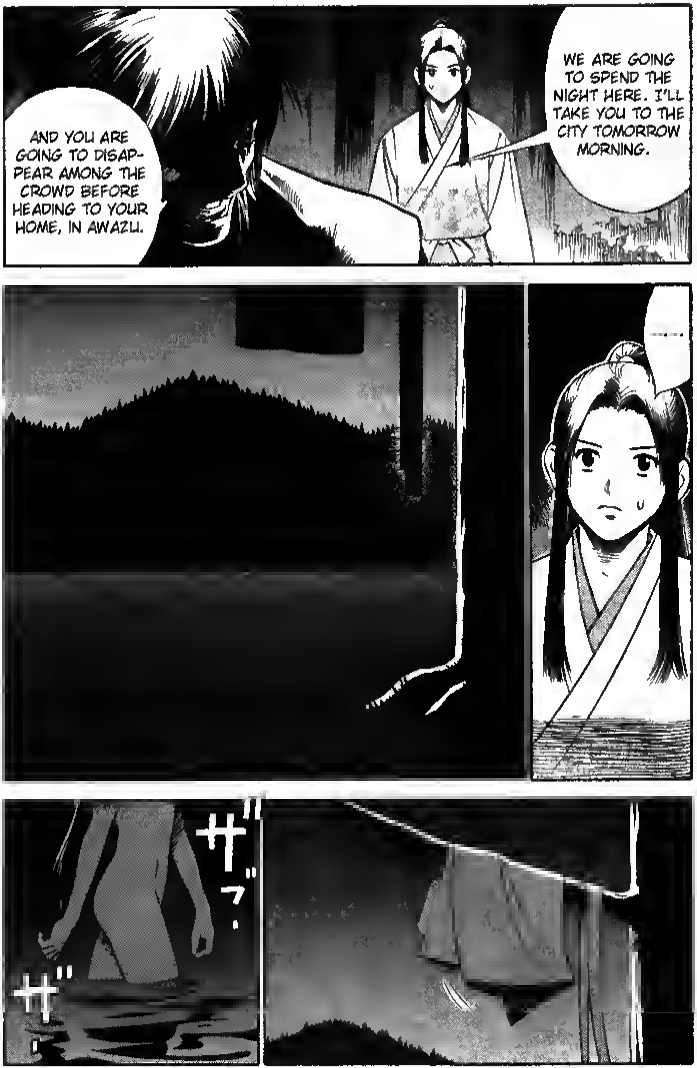
?

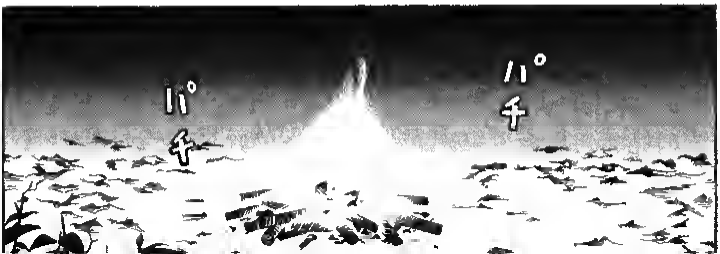
I DON'T THINK HE WILL FOLLOW US HERE...
THE CROWS WON'T BE OF MUCH HELP TO HIM DURING THE NIGHT...


WHAT DO THE CROWS HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR CHURLISHNESS?
?
AND BESIDES, WHO THE HECK ARE YOU?
YOU COULD AT LEAST BE A BIT MORE GRATEFUL! MAY I POINT OUT THAT I JUST SAVED YOUR LIFE!
AKUBE.
THE DESERTER WARRIOR FROM BEFORE...
AH.


WE ARE GOING TO SPEND THE NIGHT HERE. I'LL TAKE YOU TO THE CITY TOMORROW MORNING.
AND YOU ARE GOING TO DISAPPEAR AMONG THE CROWD BEFORE HEADING TO YOUR HOME, IN AWAZU.
.....
"H"?
"H"

WHY DID HE GO BACK ON HIS DECISION AND DID HE PROTECT ME? HE S STILL VERY BRAVE FOR THE HERMIT HE PRE-TENDS TO BE!
KLEE...
ﾊｯ
THIS MAN DIED TWO YEARS AGO...
I KNOW THIS FACE! BUT...
YAMABUKI...

AH...
YAMA-
BUKI...
MY POOR
YAMABUKI...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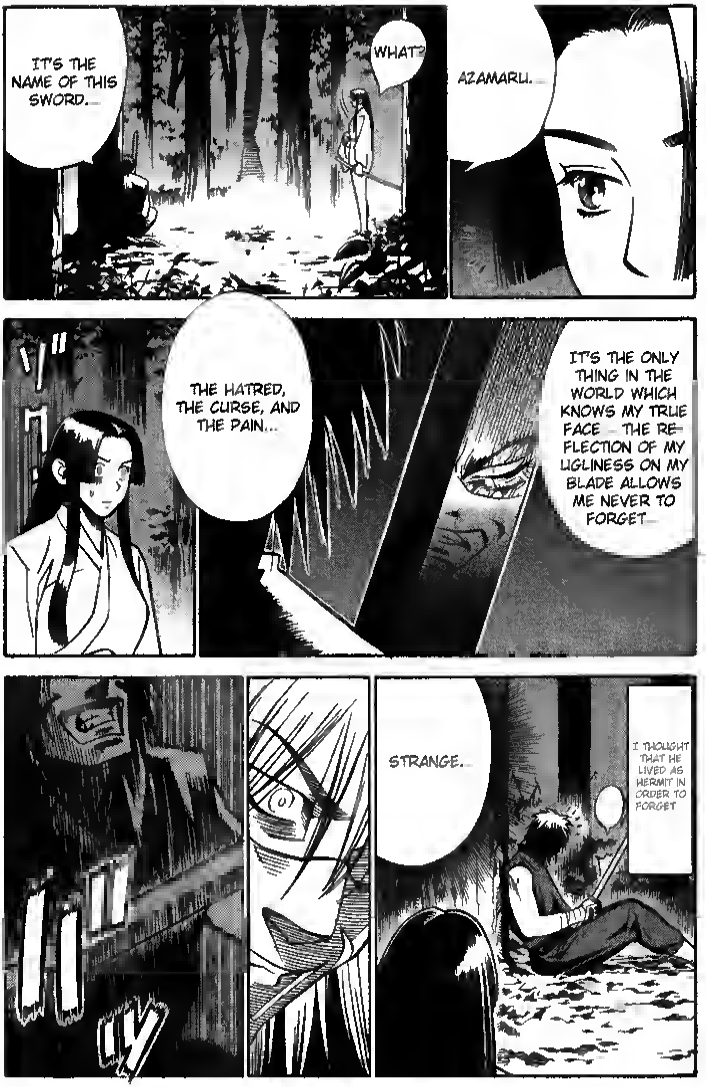
THAT SWORD HAS AN UNUSUAL SHAPE TO IT...
...
DOES IT BEAR A NAME?
AH
HE'S HIDING HIS SCARS...
HMPH...

WHY?
I BROUGHT ON THOSE BURNS ON MYSELF...
WHY?
I'M ABOUT TO TRAIN A MAN FOR BATTLE WHO WANTED TO LIVE FAR AWAY FROM WARS—
AKIRE SURELY DESIRED TO AVOID THE MEN FROM THE GENJI CLAN— FOR THIS HE THREW HIS WEAPONS HIS NAME AND EVEN HIS FACE AWAY—


IT'S THE NAME OF THIS SWORD...
WHAT?
AZAMARU...
THE HATRED, THE CURSE, AND THE PAIN...
IT'S THE ONLY THING IN THE WORLD WHICH KNOWS MY TRUE FACE — THE REFLECTION OF MY UGLINESS ON MY BLADE ALLOWS ME NEVER TO FORGET...
STRANGE...
I THOUGHT THAT HE LIVED AS HERMIT IN ORDER TO FORGET

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YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD ESCAPE FROM ME THAT EASILY?
BE ADVISED THAT I POSSESS AN INFALLIBLE NOSE...
ス
HOW IS SUCH A THING POSSIBLE!?!
IT'S REALLY HIM! HE'S ALIVE! MUSASHIBO BENKEI!
...!

PLEASE... LEND ME A HIT...
YAMA-BUKI!
ESPECIALLY FROM FEMALES... GYAHAHA!!
I LOVE THE SMELL OF URINE...
ズン
ズン
....OF YOUR COUR-AGE!!!
YAAAAAAAA!!!

YAMA-BUKI, YOSHI-NAKA...
IT'S MY TURN TO JOIN YOU IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD...
HEY, SNOT! DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU HURT ME?
...!!!
THAT'S THE END...
IT'S TICK-LING ME...

GOUAAA AAAH!!!
RHAAAA AAA!!!!
ビキッ
!!!
EH?
WHAT UNBEARABLE PAIN!
HOW IS IT POSSIBLE!
THIS SWORD... IT MEANS... YOU ARE...

SO THIS WEAPON IS...
ヌオ
I AM KAGEKIYO FROM THE TAIRA CLAN!
I'M AKUBE AND MY SWORD IS NAMED AZAMARU...
THAT'S THE ONLY THING IN THE WORLD WHICH

AAAAAAA!
...KNOWS MY TRUE FACE!!!
GUAAA!
AAAA!!!
ドサッ
AAA!!!

!
KAGE-KIYO!
I'M GONNA KILL YOU!
DO YOU HEAR ME?
I'LL NEVER FORGET...
THAT PAIN!
.....
I'M GONNA KILL YOU!!!
...
PFFF...
HE'S DOING VERY WELL...

DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW?
WE ARE NOT DEALING WITH HUMANS...
YOU JUST HAD THE TRUE FACE OF THE GENJI IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES...
THEY ARE IMMORTAL DEMONS...
AND THEY ARE TOO STURDY FOR SIMPLE WARRIORS...
YOU'D BETTER GO HOME...
AND QUICKLY...
YES...

September 1191... one year before the establishment of the "Bakufu"* government...

* THE NAME BAKUFU LITERALLY MEANS "THE TENT GOVERNMENT" AND REFERS TO THE CENTRE OF MILITARY POWER OF MINAMOTO NO YORITOMO, LOCATED IN THE CITY OF KAMAKURA FROM THE END OF THE 12TH CENTURY ONWARDS.

KAGE-KIYO!!!
YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!
THIS PAIN!!!
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!
BE SURE OF IT!
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!
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GROA
AAA!
!!!

AZAMARU

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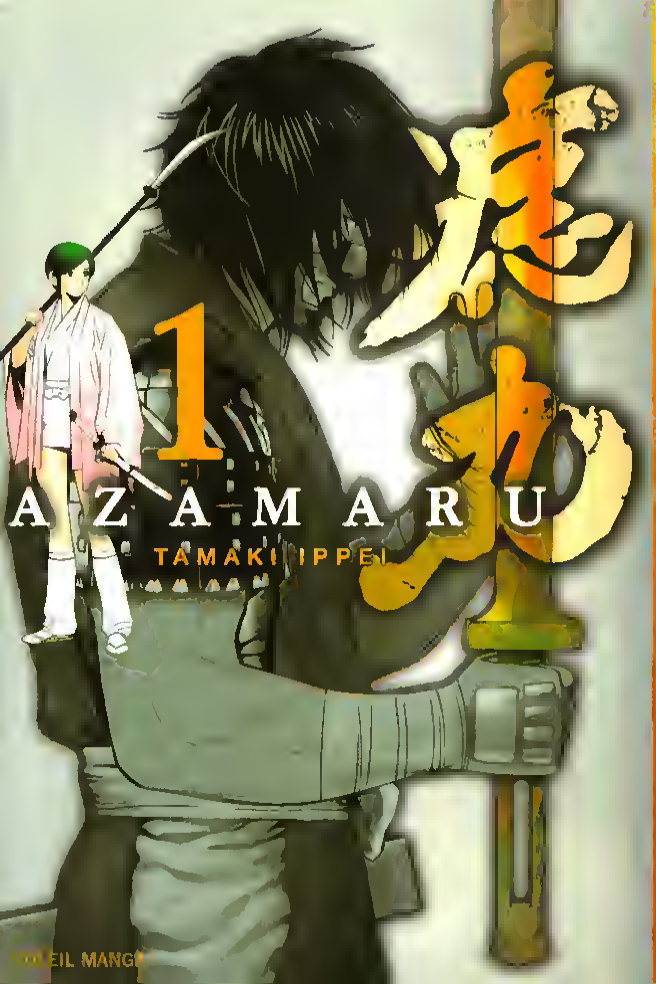

AZAMARU
TAMAKI IPPEI
SOLEIL MANGA

AZAMARU

Esthetique

SCANNED BY CINDY
TRANSLATED BY RAIWIN
PROOFREAD BY DRAGONFIREREALM
EDITED BY SHRREAL